

NATIONAL SPORTING LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

A Research Center for Turf and Field Sports, their History and Social Significance

Middleburg, Virginia 22117

Judith Ozment, Librarian

June 1988
No. 26

THOMAS GOSDEN, THE SPORTING BOOKBINDER

Thomas Gosden was not considered an artist of importance, he was not among the greatest bookbinders and he

was not a sportsman of renown. In the histories of sport and of bookbinding he received little attention and as a publisher for many years he was scarcely known. By the early 1930s only one book was known to have been written about the "sporting bookbinder." If

money is the mark of success this may explain why obscurity settled over Thomas Gosden after his death in 1843. But he was a unique character and fills an interesting place in the history of sporting literature.

Gosden was first and foremost a sportsman although a patron of the arts and a close friend of Ben Marshall, Abraham Cooper, Sawrey Gilpin and Luke Cennel. The famous portrait of him by Ben Marshall c.1814 shows him setting off for a day's shooting, gun in hand, followed by his favorite pointer, Doll, whose likeness he had engraved on his snuffbox. The other side of his character is seen in the beautifully bound volumes on sport, mostly done in green or brown leather with small emblematic designs worked in the corners and back of the books. Thus his two hobbies happily merged in his bookstore known as "The Sportsman's Repository," located at 18 Bedford Street, Covent Garden, London.

What an enticing window—full of the latest advice on angling, shooting and other field sports, new and old books all handsomely embossed with appropriate designs. The Sportsman's Repository was a fashionable place for sports minded Londoners to frequent during the first quarter of the nineteenth century when sporting literature was in its glory. The book lists of the day were full of texts on hunting, gaming, shooting, fishing; people were collecting engravings and mezzotints. Such was the atmosphere in which Gosden lived and worked.

Why then should he have led such a difficult life in impecunious circumstances? The answer is simple and unfortunate. Gosden was not sufficiently



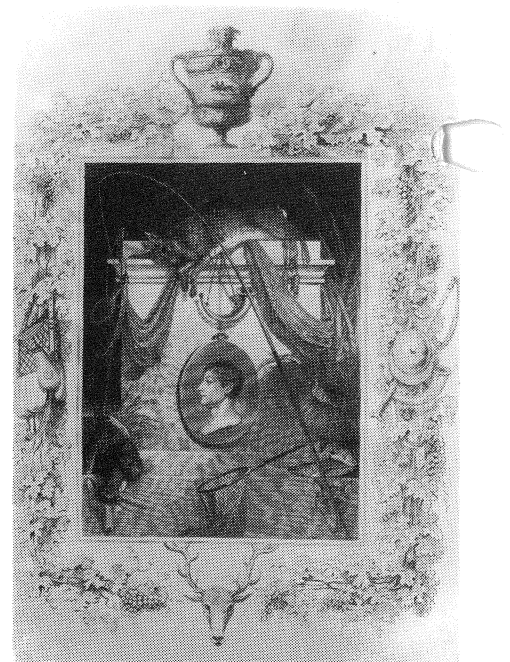
The Sportsman's portrait is reproduced as a book illustration in the decorative design used in *An Essay on Hunting*.

astute to make his efforts a paying proposition, he had no business sense or practicality. His tastes were fastidious—he had a passion for special editions printed on vellum or paper of unusual quality, he adored fine engravings and elaborately tooled leather. These tastes, as any collector knows, were as expensive in Gosden's day as in today's. These shortcomings and his love of sport eventually brought him to bankruptcy from which he never recovered.

A contemporary, Arthur Cass wrote, "nevertheless, he was esteemed a most honorable man with high moral qualities and it is said that his naivete exposed

lock where it is supposed Isaak's hand must have touched it." This edition, from the library of Sir Walter Gilbey whose note inside calls it the finest specimen of Gosden's binding in existence, is in the Sheldon Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University. In Zouch's *Life of Walton*, Gosden included as a frontispiece an engraving of the fishing house in question.

The best known evidence of Gosden's passion for sport and art is the set of silver buttons designed for his shooting jacket by A. Cooper and engraved by J. Scott, an artist and friend of the sports-



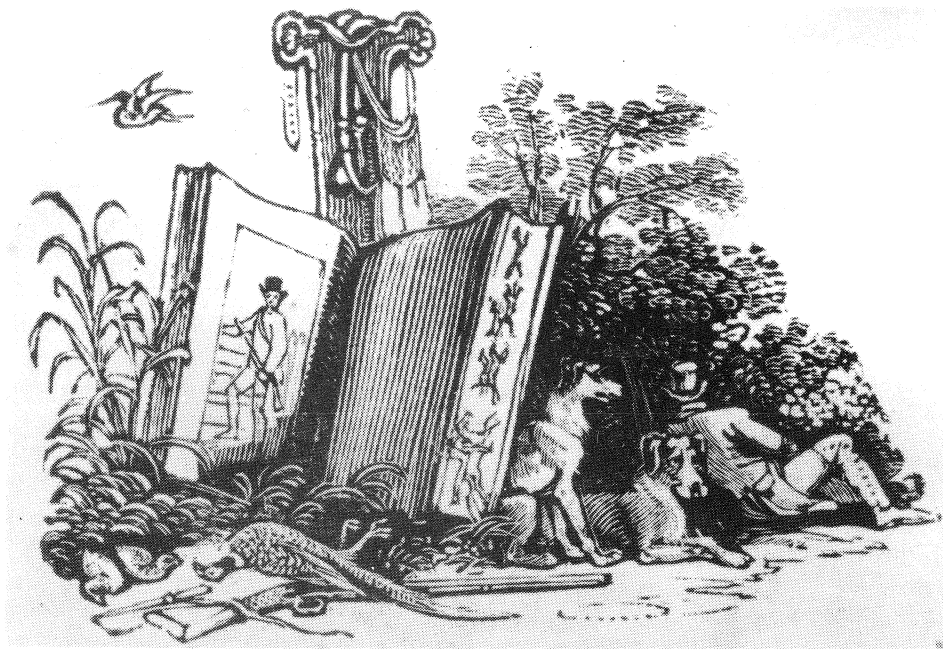
The frontispiece to *An Essay on Hunting*, with the medallion head portrait of Gosden, is an example of his craftsmanship and attention to detail.

books on sport and art and the first collector of Gosdeniana. When the Gilbey collection sold in 1915, Mr. Charles Sheldon acquired the buttons which together with *The Complete Angler* and many other items form a part of the Sheldon Collection of Sporting Books at the Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University.

The NSL has in its collection two fine works of the bookbinder's art from the Sporting Repository; a third edition of *Essay on Hunting* by a 'Country Squire,' a reprint by Gosden of the 1733 edition. It has the Gosden portrait by Scott as frontispiece, engraved title, and woodcuts in the text as decorations. Another excellent example is *A Treatise on Greyhounds* by "a Sportsman," the second edition published 1825. This copy is bound in half leather with marbled covers and lining paper, the top edge is gilt. Five greyhound heads are embossed in gilt on the spine between the raised bands.

After Gosden's death in 1843 at age sixty-three his library was sold for eight hundred pounds, a very large amount for the day. Afterward his name was speedily forgotten for a time. Today while little is known about the man, his legacy survives in the exquisite books from his "Sportsman's Repository."

This article was taken in part from The Sportsman 1931, NSL Periodical Collection



"The Sportsman," an engraving after a portrait of Gosden by his friend Benjamin Marshall. The famous set of buttons are shown on the hunting jacket.

him to become a prey to the villainy of others." It is believed that this trait led him to the error of publishing Thomas Pike Lathey's plagiarized poem, *The Angler*. Gosden paid the unscrupulous novelist, whose only claim to fame rests in this fraud, a considerable sum, in the 1800s, of thirty pounds. When the poem was published he discovered to his horror and financial loss that it had been copied from one written by Dr. Thomas Scott and previously published in 1758.

At this time there was an upsurge of interest in Walton mounting to a cult, with Gosden foremost among the worshippers. The monogram of Isaak Walton and Charles Cotton appear on illustrations, bindings and engravings of the Gosden bound books. His edition of *The Complete Angler*, published 1808, had "bands made of wood taken from the door of Cotton's fishing house, near the

man. Their interest lies not only in the excellence of design but also in the story of their creation. Legend has it that one evening when Scott and Gosden were together, they were looking over the news of the day and came across an item that Napoleon had recently commissioned buttons to be designed with scenes of the chase represented. Scott took up the idea and told Gosden that if he would pay for the buttons, he Scott would engrave them and "will stake ten times their value that they shall beat the great Emperor's buttons or those of any other person in the world as perfect representations of the various animals of the chase." Gosden accepted and the buttons were subsequently engraved from designs by A. Cooper, R.A. These buttons, together with the Marshall portrait were for many years in the possession of Sir Walter Gilbey, author of numerous

RE THE HUNTING SEAT CONTROVERSY: AN INTERESTING EARLY ENGLISH REFERENCE TO RIDING FORWARD

Josephus Symphon, *Twenty-Five Actions of the Manage Horse*, London 1729 states, "Besides the seat used by officers, and those who like to have their horses bitted, the Hunting Seat has its advantages; I mean for ease, both to the horse and rider, which is principally to be considered in hunting. It is like the seat of the Asiatic nations, who are much on horseback, with short stirrups and light saddles. Neither is the seat so easily obtained; and though it may not appear graceful as that of the manage, it is found very necessary in our fine hunting countries upon a long chase, viz. to sit light, and humour the horse's motions by inclining the body, and save his wind by pulling the reins, more or less, according to the ground he runs over, which will greatly help him to last the day; whereas

one that is ignorant of this method will soon blow his horse, and put an end to his sport.

In foreign countries where they know nothing of this manner of riding, they have several relays to mount when their horses are blown, of which they seldom fail: But a single horse in good order, and rid with judgment, will last beyond all their relays, stick close to the hounds to the end of the day, twice a week throughout the whole hunting season, and hold it for many years, with due care; when I believe in France they scarce have a horse that with their riding will hold out one day's sport, or last one season, so little do they understand how to ride or feed their hunters, which are all bought in England.

Both these seats seem useful; nor does it lessen either that there are pedants in both. Observe never to have a slack hand with a snaffle, nor an over-tight one with a bitt."

Contributed by William Steinkraus

RECENT ACQUISITIONS DONATIONS

The NSL recently received three important collections of sporting books, periodicals and ephemera from William Brainard, Jr. ex-MFH Old Dominion Hounds and Director of the NSL; from the estate of the late David and Becky Sharp, Jt-MB Nantucket-Trewern Beagles and from the late Edward Durell.

The Brainard collection consists of early *National Horse Show Official Catalogues* in bound volumes, three bound volumes of *National Horse Show Official Magazines*, 38 volumes of the *English Racing Calendar* 1860-1897 and the *The British Racehorse Magazine* 1952-1976. Casings of Flat Race Meetings 1932-1941, 1944-1956; Casings of Racing Meets 1954-1966; Casings of Hunt Race Meetings 1955-1956 and Point-to-Point Programs 1960-1970 provide a welcome addition to the library's collection on steeplechasing and point-to-point racing.

The Sharp's collection will be the subject of a more detailed article in a future newsletter. Highlights of the collection are eleven volumes from the Derrydale Press; an 1820 edition of

Beckford on Hunting; Warwick Woodlands by Frank Forester 1/90; Rarey's *The Art of Taming Horses* 1858; *Cynegitia or Essays on Sporting* 1788 and a fine copy of *The Art and the Pleasures of Hare-Hunting in Six Letters to a Person of Quality* by John Gardiner 1750. The author writes in his first letter, "a lover of Hunting every man is, or would be thought, but twenty in a field after a hare find more delight and sincere enjoyment than one in twenty in a fox chase, the former consisting of an endless variety of delights, the latter of little more than hard riding."

The Library received from the late Mr. Durell eleven Gordon Grand titles published by the Derrydale Press. A unique item in the collection is the original typed manuscript of *The Old Man* as submitted by Grand to Eugene Connett of the Derrydale Press in 1932. Bound by Bennett of New York in full gilt stamped red morocco with raised bands and top edge gilt; a handwritten letter from Grand to Connett is tipped in. Handwritten notes throughout the MS are in black ink and red pencil.

The literature and the history of turf and field sport will be preserved for future generations through the generosity of these sportsmen of today.

RECENT ACQUISITIONS PURCHASES

by Alexander Mackay-Smith

The National Sporting Library has recently purchased a copy of the fourth edition, 1609, of Thomas Blundeville's *The foure chieffest offices belonging to horsemanship painfully collected out of a number of Authors*. Written by "Master Blundeville of Newton Flotman in Norfolk, imprinted at London by Humfrey Lownes, for the Company of Stationers." This text is the first major work by an Englishman on riding and veterinary art and is a cornerstone in any collection on the history and development of equestrian arts and horse breeding.

A scholar who wrote on logic, astronomy, government, mathematics and the education of young gentlemen for public service, Blundeville in 1560 published an English translation of Frederico Grisone's 1550 *Gli Ordini di Cavalcare*, which ushered in the art of riding now known as Dressage. In 1565 he published the first edition of the book under consideration. The extended title continues, *That is to say, the office of the Breeder, of the Rider, of the Keeper, and of the Ferrer. In the first part whereof is declared, the order of breeding of horses: in the second, how to breake them, and to make them horses of service; Containing the whole art of Riding lately set forth, and now newly corrected, and amended by the Author, thirdly how to diet them, fourthly, to what diseases they be subject and how to cure them*. The last three offices are translations of Grisone's earlier works, but Blundeville's first book on the breeding of horses was an original contribution. This was the most important work on the breeds of horses which had been published up to that time.

The main purpose of his treatise, which he dedicated to the Right Honorable, the Lord Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Master of the Queen Majesty's horses, was to urge Leicester to enforce Henry VIII's wise statutes for the encouragement of breeding, so that the royal parks "might not wholly be occupied to the keeping of deer, but partly to the breeding of horses for service." Blundeville further urged the Master of the Horse to "ensure that not only a sufficient number of able horses be bred within the realm, but also that they be broken, kept, maintained and exercised

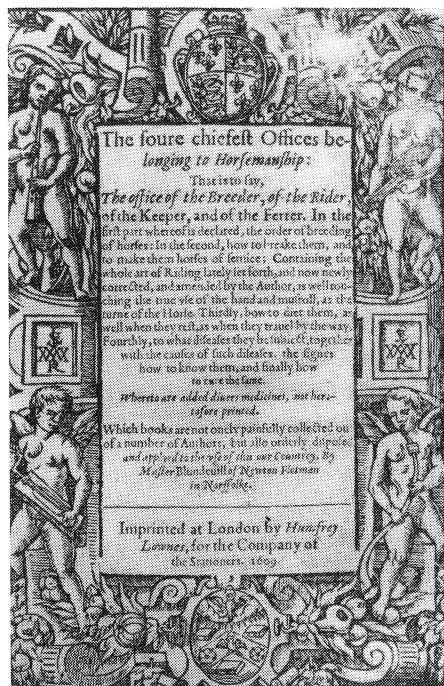
accordingly." In the matter of breeding he offered to instruct Leicester "how to conceive either horse foals or mare foals, and of what colour you wish."

With memories of the Norman invasion, Blundeville was particularly anxious to increase the number of suitable cavalry horses in England. The military horse was a trotter with two feet on the diagonal always on the ground. Even with the use of stirrups which had been common in Europe for 800 years, no one at that time had thought of rising in the stirrups to make the trot a comfortable gait. For comfort Blundeville prescribes an ambler (pacer), the gait in which the right front and rear feet are on the ground simulatenously, followed by the left rear and front. Although the back of the trotter rises and falls, the back of the ambler remains relatively steady, swaying slightly from side to side. To produce ambling horses he recommends the use of Irish Hobbies, Spanish Jennets and crosses of the same. His section on the Irish Hobby, printed below, is interesting since it was the importations of these horses which formed the basis for the American colonial quarter race horse in Virginia and the Carolinas and the Narragansett pacer in Rhode Island and Connecticut.

The Irish Hobby, 'The Iryshe Hobby is a pretty fine hors, haveing a good Head, and a body indifferently well proportioned, saving that many of them be slender and thin buttocked, they be tender mouthed, nimble, light, pleasant and apt to be taught and for the most part they be amblers and therefore very meet for the saddle and to travel by the way, yea and the Iriyshe men both with darts and light spears do use to skirmish with them in the field. And many of them do prove to that use very well, by means they be so light and swift; notwithstanding I take them to be very neashe and tender to keep, and also to be somewhat skittish and fearfull, partlye perhaps by nature and partly for lack of good breaking at firste.'

Blundeville remarked, "who wants a horse which, spurred forward in battle, falls a-hopping and dancing up and down in one place?"

Blundeville includes chapters on the "Turky, the horse of Barbary, the horses of Sardinia and Corsica, the Flanders horse, Frizeland (Friesian) horse, the Swiethland (Swiss), the horse of Hungary" in addition to the Irish Hob-



Title page of Thomas Blundeville's 1609 publication on breeding, riding, veterinary science and shoeing, *The Four Chiefest Offices Belonging to Horsemanship*.

by. He refers to English horses only indirectly.

For speed Blundeville recommends the Barb. When the pedigrees of the modern Thoroughbred horse are run back into the sixteenth century, most of the known stallions are Barbs with a few Turks as well. It was not until the seventeenth century that horses from Arabia were imported from the Bedouin tribes. On page four Blundeville says, "those horses which we commonly call Barbarians do come out of the king of Tunis land, out of Massilia and Numidia, which for the most part be but little horses, but very swift and able to make a long cariere (race), which is why we esteem them so much." He continues, "if any man desires to have swift run-

ners, he will choose a horse of Barbarie or a Turke to be his Stallion" . . . "to run wagers, to gallop the bucke or follow a long winged Hawke."

Blundeville's advice was followed by the seventeenth century breeders who developed the English racehorse into the ancestors of the modern Thoroughbred.

The NSL is most fortunate to have been able to acquire this very rare and important volume. A former owner has inscribed an interesting note in the back of the book commenting on the procedure for shoeing of "all manner of Hooves" to the effect that "the top of the nail heads should appear above the shoe no more than the breadth of the back of a knife."

OFFICERS—DIRECTORS

Chairman of the Board
Alexander Mackay-Smith

President
George L. Ohrstrom, Jr.

Secretary
George A. Horkan, Jr.

Treasurer
Col. Dale Hogoboom, Jr.

Assistant Secretary-Treasurer
Patricia Boyce

Librarian
Judith Ozment

Directors
Arthur W. Arundel
William W. Brainard, Jr.

John H. Daniels

John W. Warner

Ellen B. Wells

James L. Young

Please enroll me as a member of
THE FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL SPORTING LIBRARY, INC.
in the class checked below.

My check for _____ dollars is enclosed.

- ☐ Life Member \$500.00
☐ Sponsor \$100.00
☐ Sustaining Member \$ 50.00
☐ Member \$ 15.00

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Donations of books as well as cash are acceptable for membership.

All gifts, both books and cash, are tax deductible.

Make checks payable to: National Sporting Library, P.O. Box 1335
Middleburg, Virginia 22117